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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [MARR](#) [CVIS](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND PRESIDENT-ELECT LOBO DISCUSS NEED
FOR MICHELETTI RESIGNATION, UNITY GOVERNMENT AND TRANSITION
PLANS

REF: A. 09 TEGUCIGALPA 1328
[1](#)B. 09 TEGUCIGALPA 1315
[1](#)C. 09 TEGUCIGALPA 1310

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reason 1.4 (B and D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador met with President-elect Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo at the Embassy on January 4 and discussed the need for full implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord, and most importantly for de facto regime leader Micheletti to step aside immediately. Lobo sought the Ambassador's counsel on building international support for his administration, and reaffirmed his desire to build his own government of national unity to foster reconciliation in Honduran society and politics. They agreed a truth commission would aid in healing society's wounds following months of strife. The Ambassador also noted the importance of showing clear civilian authority over the Honduran Armed Forces (HOAF), and in particular the negative impact on both the country and the HOAF itself of appointing a Minister of Defense who was associated with the June 28 coup d'etat. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador and president-elect Lobo, who had just returned from a brief holiday visiting relatives in New Orleans, met January 4 in the Ambassador's office. Lobo thanked the Ambassador for notifying Diplomatic Security of his visit, which allowed him to forego some of his Honduran security package while on vacation. Lobo said he was somewhat uncomfortable with the large size and high profile of the Honduran armed forces (HOAF) security detail assigned to him immediately following his election, and the relative anonymity he enjoyed in New Orleans was a relief after the pressure of the campaign and the post-election political environment. Lobo appeared tanned, rested and ready to take on the many challenges that face him.

Status of the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord

[1](#)3. (C) The Ambassador told Lobo that the United States remained fully committed to the full implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord, noting that the USG saw the

status of accord implementation as a compass for re-establishing the democratic and constitutional order in Honduras. He said the USG appreciated Lobo's parallel interest in resolving the political crisis following the June 2009 coup d'etat. The Ambassador said time was running out, and de facto regime leader Micheletti needed to make a decision to step down immediately to allow creation of a national unity government in advance of the January 27 inauguration. He said the USG understood that at this late stage, a complete change in cabinet was not feasible, but that Micheletti's departure well before inauguration day and the replacement of at least the Minister of Government was necessary if Honduras was to draw international support for the inauguration and the normalization of relations with the Lobo administration.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador stated that U.S. insistence on Micheletti's departure was the reason for the January 5-6 visit of Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Craig Kelly. He said that Washington was not inclined to look favorably on Micheletti waiting until the last days before the inauguration to step aside; a mid-January departure was necessary in order to give Lobo the space to build some international support and hope for international participation in the inauguration. The Ambassador explained that PDAS Kelly would offer positive incentives for Micheletti and his team to step aside, but would also make clear that if Micheletti continued to thumb his nose at the United States and the rest of the international community, there would be repercussions. He said it would be very difficult for Micheletti and his supporters to ever get their

U.S. visas back, for example.

¶5. (C) Lobo responded that he was totally committed to the full implementation of the accord and immediate resignation of Micheletti in favor of a national unity government. He said that -- as the Ambassador was aware, he had met with Micheletti twice to press him to step aside, and had also made frequent public statements in support of the accord. Lobo said he believed Micheletti was looking for a way out, but his hard line supporters were making this difficult for him. He noted Micheletti is isolated, and the hard liners are constantly telling him he is a great hero, loved by the Honduran public for saving democracy -- and that the Americans will not restore his visa even if he does step down now. Lobo added that he supported PDAS Kelly's visit, and confirmed that he and former Honduran president Ricardo Maduro would brief Kelly on Maduro's January 4 meeting with Salvadoran FM Martinez. Lobo said that he would follow up on Kelly's visit by meeting with Micheletti again to press him to step down immediately.

Transition and Building a Cabinet

¶6. (C/NF) The Ambassador said he understood Lobo wanted to send his senior advisors, especially his economic team to Washington for consultations, but given the current efforts he thought it would be bad timing (Ref A). He noted that both sides of the U.S. political spectrum were placing pressure on the administration regarding Honduras, and the Democrats in Congress had placed a hold on millions of dollars of assistance money for Honduras. The Ambassador suggested Lobo wait and see how Kelly's visit went, and Lobo agreed.

¶7. (C) The Ambassador praised Lobo for his keen commitment to creating his own national unity government. He said he knew that Lobo had made offers to the leadership of the other political parties to join in the new administration. Lobo confirmed that he had offered the Minister of Culture position to center-left Social Democratic Innovation and Unity (PINU) Party presidential candidate Bernard Martinez and Minister of Labor to center-right Christian Democratic

Party presidential candidate Felicito Avila, and both had accepted. Lobo said he had also offered positions to senior members of Liberal Party presidential candidate Elvin Santos' team, noting that Santos himself had stated he was not prepared to take a position himself in the next government. Lobo added that he had offered a cabinet position to left-of-center, (and anti-coup) Democratic Unification Party candidate Cesar Ham, but had not yet received a reply. Lobo asked the Ambassador for his help in encouraging Ham to accept a role in the government, noting he was aware the Ambassador had met with Ham in December. (Note: Ham met with the Ambassador December 17. Details reported Ref C. End note.)

18. (C) Lobo also sought the Ambassador's help in finding a counterbalance to his popular designee for Security Minister, Oscar Alvarez. Lobo noted that Alvarez, who received the most votes of any congressional candidate in the November 2009 election, was an "empire builder," and therefore Lobo wanted to find a designee for Vice Minister who would not be "Alvarez's man." (Note: Alvarez, who was Security Minister in the Maduro administration, has already stated his intent to select his former Vice Minister Armando Caledonio. According to Honduran law, the Vice Minister position is nominated by the Minister, subject to approval by the President. End note.) Lobo noted security was not his area of expertise, and he hoped the Ambassador could suggest names of some qualified, clean candidates for the position who would not be beholden to Alvarez. He said on the matter of addressing the transnational threat of crime and trafficking, sovereignty was not an issue, and he welcomed U.S. inputs. The Ambassador said he would consult his security and law

enforcement team on the matter.

Truth Commission

19. (C) Lobo agreed with the Ambassador's suggestion to invite Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord Verification Commission members Labor Secretary Solis and former Chilean president Lagos to come to Honduras in February and join their Honduran Verification Commission colleagues in launching a truth commission. The Ambassador stressed that a truth commission would be a critical element in achieving national reconciliation, along with a government of national unity. He acknowledged there was no cookie-cutter method to forming or conducting the work of a post-conflict truth commission, and that while there were certainly human rights violations committed during the political crisis that followed the June 2009 coup, Honduras had not seen the levels of violence as other countries which had formed truth commissions, such as Chile, Guatemala or South Africa. Lobo agreed with the Ambassador that the truth commission should be a forum for all stories to be told surrounding the political crisis without indicting anyone, acknowledging that all sides of the political classes had failed Honduran society in the political collapse of 2009. They agreed that what had taken place was a failure of political leadership by President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya in the months leading up to the June coup, as well as Micheletti and other institutions in supporting the coup. Lobo stated that while he believed Zelaya had largely created the environment that led to the coup, he also believed that what took place in June was wrong. Lobo said he felt the Organization of American States (OAS) would have a natural role to play in forming and supporting the truth commission.

The Armed Forces

110. (C) The Ambassador said that another important element for restoring the international community's confidence in Honduras and Honduran democracy was for the new administration to demonstrate clearly that the HOAF was under

civilian control. He said the HOAF had taken a major step backward in its role in the coup, though in fairness, it had been the civilian political factions on both sides which had dragged the HOAF into the political conflict. The Ambassador advised Lobo to take steps to establish to the international community that the HOAF was under strong civilian management, and that to do so would not only help Honduras, but also the HOAF itself by restoring its positive image internationally. He noted that he had heard Chief of Defense MG Vasquez Velasquez was lobbying hard to be appointed Minister of Defense, and that this would be seen very negatively by the international community, given Vasquez's role in the coup. The Ambassador stressed it was Lobo's decision to make, but that selection of any military figure closely associated with the coup would create a serious image problem in the international perspective.

¶11. (C) Lobo acknowledged that management of the HOAF would be a critical challenge for his administration. He said that Vasquez was on his short list for Defense Minister, and he had not considered the international implications of such an appointment, but saw the Ambassador's point clearly. Lobo said he would not appoint Vasquez to be his Defense Minister. He noted Vasquez was seeking a "soft landing" in the civilian political forum, but that he would encourage Vasquez to stay away from government for a while and revisit his prospects in six months or so.

¶12. (C) Comment: Despite showing a clear appreciation of the serious social and economic challenges before him, Lobo appeared relaxed and confident during the meeting -- a far cry from the pre-election Lobo, who had worn the stress of

the campaign heavily. Lobo also made a point that "two thirds of Honduras's international portfolio is the United States" and he was eager to rebuild a strong relationship with the United States. Lobo has made every indication that he fully grasps the broader implications of the Honduran political crisis and is prepared to show the sort of leadership that has been sorely lacking in the persons of President Zelaya and de facto regime leader Micheletti. End comment.
LLORENS